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ABSTRACT

As part of the current federal welfare, health care, and workforce development reforms, Congress is considering replacing such programs as Perkins Vocational and Applied Technology and Tech Prep with a single, unified system of job-training and training-related activities. At the same time, business and industry are faced with enormous challenges in maintaining a competitive workforce in the face of the increasing percentage of skilled positions required. Community colleges are emerging as the major, potential providers of workforce training in a new unified system. Recent studies have shown that 96% of the nation's community colleges are directly involved with training and education services to business and industry, while 8 out of 10 businesses, industries, or manufacturing centers were familiar with and/or utilizing community college training services. Further, community colleges have included workforce training in their mission and practices and view their role as a partner with business rather than just a training provider. Finally, the colleges are poised to take a leadership role in workforce training because they can provide the following: (1) one-stop operations, providing assessment, training, referral, financial assistance, and placement; (2) targeted, on-the-job, and industry-specific training; (3) services for special populations; (4) integrated methodologies, including advanced computerized and distance technologies; (5) articulated learning experiences between high schools and universities; and (6) accountability. (HAA)

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Responding to the Challenges of Workforce and Economic Development

The Role of America's Community Colleges

White Paper

Philip R. Day, Jr., Chairman

Commission on Workforce and Community Development
American Association of Community Colleges
Washington, DC

May, 1996

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The Role of America's Community Colleges

Commission on Workforce and Community Development

American Association of Community Colleges

May, 1996

Dr. Philip R. Day, Jr., Chairman

Introduction

Government leaders at the state and national levels have devoted time and energy throughout the past several years to evaluating the effectiveness of the American workforce's ability to deal with challenges of emerging technologies, a redefined workplace, and international competition. At the same time, the process of "reinventing government" has been unfolding within the context of reducing government spending, eliminating duplication and overlapping services, and redistributing both power and money to the states and communities.

Responding to the national debate regarding workforce training and the role of government and the private sector, the American Association of Community Colleges has appointed a Commission on Workforce and Community Development to review and assess the current capacities of the community colleges to be considered as a major player in new workforce initiatives and to advise the AACC Board on broad-based issues related to this area. Recently, the Association asked that the Commission develop a statement reflecting the current and future role of community colleges in responding to the challenges associated with the nation's workforce development agenda. Responding to the Challenges of Workforce and Economic Development is the initial position paper of the AACC Commission spelling out the context and rationale for a greater national involvement of the community colleges as prime providers of lifelong workforce training. Given the likelihood of vigorous discussion and debate on these issues during the upcoming presidential and congressional election campaigns, this paper is being presented as documentation of the role that community colleges can play in the enhancement of the American economy and the work life of its citizens.

The Changing Context

New federal welfare, health care and workforce development reform legislation is likely to consolidate myriad programs into a number of block grants, substantially reduce federal financial support, and shift primary authority for the design and delivery of support programs and services to states and communities. The workforce development/job consolidation will collapse over 129 different training and education programs that are currently housed in three major departments (Labor, Education, and Housing and Urban Development). Such programs as Perkins Vocational and Applied Technology, School-to-Work, Tech Prep, Adult Education/Adult Literacy, Vocational Rehabilitation (to name a few) are all being targeted for elimination and/or significant changes in direction.

In its place, Congress, through the Workforce Development/Careers Act and other proposed legislation is in the process of developing plans to establish a single, unified system of job-training and training-related activities. The expected outcomes of the legislation will be:

- To reduce duplication of expenditures to operate program and services;
- To strengthen local economic development initiatives;
- To encourage business/industry and education to jointly improve workforce development programs for youth and adults;
- To effectively utilize the new workforce development initiative to transition welfare recipients to gainful employment;
- To provide for more accessible information about job preparation and training through one-stop centers;
- To provide for a greater degree of accountability and performance-based assessment;
- To provide fiscal incentives to increase the academic and vocational skill levels of current and future employees; and most importantly,
- To provide for a highly skilled workforce to support the country's economic development initiatives.

For their part, business and industry are faced with enormous challenges and workforce development is critical to their future competitiveness. The workplace is undergoing tremendous transition. In 1950, 60% of all jobs were unskilled and required little, if any, post-secondary experience. By 1991, only 35% of all jobs were "unskilled." Interestingly, the percentage of professional jobs requiring a four-year degree or more remained unchanged at 20%. However, the percentage of skilled jobs, requiring formal post-secondary education and training, grew to become the largest proportion of the workforce sector. That trend is expected to continue through the year 2000 with jobs requiring technical skills expected to grow to 65% of the market while unskilled, low-end wage jobs expected to shrink to just 15% of the market. T he professional job market is expected to remain at about the 20% level, as it was in 1950.

Four year colleges and universities (with help from community college transfer

programs and students) have done an effective job of preparing the top 20% of the population for productive work and satisfying lives. However, economists and labor analysts generally agree that the preparation of the remaining 80% of the population with basic reading, writing, computational, information processing, business, technical and learning skills, remains the critical training imperative. Some estimates indicate that up to 75% of the existing workforce will require significant job retraining over the next five years, due to changes in the workforce (e.g., the impact of technology) and the retirement of large number of older workers. Add the challenges posed by welfare reform whereby welfare-to-work expectations reflect a need for people to obtain and keep jobs that pay enough for them to support their families and maintain financial stability and independence. One concludes that the stakes are high on almost every level, economically, socially, and politically. Therefore, the times are particularly opportune for looking at new models to train a world class workforce.

Responding to the Challenge: America's Community College

Community colleges are emerging as perhaps the major, potential providers of workforce training required to revitalize and maintain the competitiveness of the nation's businesses and industries. Currently, there are approximately 1,300 community colleges strategically located within 25 miles of 95% of the nation's population base and its core businesses that are the backbone of the U.S. economy. Today, the majority of the nation's first-time in college freshmen, minority students, and women are enrolled in America's Peoples' College.

Recent studies completed by the League for Innovation in the Community College and jointly by the National Council on Community Services and Continuing Education and The Cooperative for the Advancement of Community-Based Post-Secondary Education (COMBASE) have underscored the important and rapidly expanding role of the community colleges in this arena. Specifically:

- 96% of the community colleges involved with both studies indicated that they were very directly involved with providing training and education services to business and industry;
- 8 out of 10 area businesses/industries/manufacturing centers were familiar with and/or are utilizing the training services of their local community college;
- Principal reasons cited by business and industry contributing to their decision to contract with community colleges for training services were:
  - Cost-effective value for money invested;
  - Quality of instruction;
  - Customized training design; and
  - Location, either on-site or at local college.
- Types of training provided by community college have or has included:
  - Workplace literacy;

- Supervision/management skills;
- Computer-related technology training (computer integrated manufacturing, statistical process control, etc.)
- Communication skills, interpersonal relations; and
- Technical training skill courses.

Other states (Iowa, Michigan, Illinois, Florida, Mississippi, Maryland and Texas) have conducted similar studies but focused on their own delivery systems, and have obtained similar results. Clearly, community colleges are playing a key role in th training of America's workforce for a number of reasons.

1. The mission and practices of community colleges have clearly "staked out" this area (workforce, business/industry training, and economic development) as a priority for institutional development and emphasis;

2. Community colleges perceive their role as a partner with business and industry rather than just a training provider. They make a concerted effort to engage business and industry in all aspects of their planning, i.e., institutional, program and advisory boards. Correspondingly, businesses and industries look at their local community college as the logical first choice for training services.

3. Community colleges have a significant track record of success and customer satisfaction. Their experience in providing programs and services for adult students, who make up the bulk of the existing workforce, is clearly to their advantage.

4. Community colleges know how to customize their programs for targeted businesses and industries and have invested in advanced instructional technology and laboratories (often times with industry-donated equipment) which are a "mirror-image" of the worksite conditions; and

5. Community colleges have invested heavily in establishing support services for students especially in basic skills and student assessment, counseling, advising, remediation, child care, career development and job placement services that are critically important for both students and employees.

A Vision for the Future

As leaders at both the national and state level struggle to design and put in place a consolidated system of job training services, the community colleges must not be overlooked. The community colleges are committed to supporting economic growth and job development at the local, state and national level. The nation's community colleges have been quick to respond to the country's changing human resource requirements and economic needs; and they have demonstrated exceptional fiscal and program performance outcomes. This country's vast network of 1,300 community colleges should be viewed as a "primary player" in the future, comprehensive, workforce development system.

The future vision for community colleges is that each of the community colleges will function as one of the Nation's front-line Workforce Development Education and Training Centers. Each college can serve as the leading provider of workforce education and training, and continue to join with regional/state/ local businesses to strengthen the economic competitiveness and provide the critical link between training services and jobs.

Because of the emphasis each community college places on collaboration and partnerships, the system can contribute to the elimination of unwarranted duplication of education, training, and employment activities and be built on a solid cooperative foundation. Significantly, most community college districts have demonstrated their commitment to collaborative efforts by becoming "partners" with other providers of training and employment-related services (Jobs and Benefits/Labor, Health and Human Services, etc.) Many colleges share resources and facilities with these organizations in an attempt to better focus on the needs of the clients to be served. K-12/community college partnerships through Tech-Prep and School-to-Work programs also enhance their training potential and opportunities.

Community colleges currently offer a seamless educational experience from adult basic skills in the college/vocational preparatory programs to points of entry into the nation's workforce or ultimately to transition to future career-training opportunities at a four-year college or university. It is common for community colleges to offer literacy education, English as a Second Language, and Foreign Language Skills training to the growing number of citizens who wish to enter education and training programs designed to prepare them for the high-wage, high-skilled jobs of the future.

The nation's community colleges are positioned to take a leadership role in workforce development activities. All colleges can provide:

ONE-STOP OPERATIONS that cooperate and collaborate to provide outreach, intake, assessment, career counseling, education and training referral, financial assistance, job placement, other transition-to-work referral assistance, and maximize the use of advanced technology to deliver cost effective services. The new opportunity available to community colleges to be "linked-up" to the National Department of Labor "Internet Access Zone" enhances the capacity of the local community colleges to be a partner in providing critical employment and training information to clients in need. It is expected that a significant majority of community colleges will join this effort.

TARGETED JOB TRAINING for students seeking high-wage employment and employers seeking high-skilled employees.

ON-THE-JOB-TRAINING including apprenticeships, internships, cooperative education and work-based learning paid experiences;

INDUSTRY-SPECIFIC CUSTOMIZED TRAINING, including "just in time" training, as needed, for current and future employees;

SERVICES FOR SPECIAL POPULATIONS including educationally and economically disadvantaged youth and adults, veterans, Native Americans,

migrant and seasonal farmworkers, welfare-to-work transition clients, individuals with disabilities, dislocated workers, underemployed workers, women and minorities, single parents, single pregnant women, non-English speaking persons, illiterate persons, the homeless and criminal offenders;

HISTORICAL COLLABORATIVE VENTURES designed to foster economic and human resource development including: K-12 Systems, Labor and Employment Services, Health, Human and Rehabilitative Services, county/city commissions, chambers of commerce, economic development agencies, private industry councils, and business/ industry;

INTEGRATED METHODOLOGIES including advanced computerized learning systems and distance learning technical applications in academic and technical education programs, producing high-skilled graduates;

ARTICULATED LEARNING EXPERIENCES between high schools and other colleges and universities, including Tech Prep and School-to-Work Programs; and

ACCOUNTABILITY FOR RESULTS, as demonstrated by competency skill standards, licensure, successful job placement and other performance indicators.

Conclusion

America's community colleges are ready and willing to play a leadership role in the nation's workforce development future. This has been the historic and traditional (albeit often-times unnoticed) role of the community colleges. This market-driven, placement-based, community-managed, customer-focused, outcome-accountable model will contribute to more cost-effective use of federal, state, and local taxpayer dollars at a time of declining resources available to improve the competitive skill levels of America's workforce. It is our belief that we are poised to help this country move into the 21st century with a qualified well-trained workforce and that we will all benefit in a better future. From a national policy standpoint, it is our contention that if the vast potential and capabilities of the network of community colleges is not recognized and utilized effectively in the workforce development strategies adopted by this country, the new initiatives are in danger again of failing and the status quo will be maintained. It is our hope that this message will emerge during the upcoming presidential and congressional campaigns when the deliberations and formulations of positions on key issues contribute significantly to the shaping of public opinion and commitment.